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U.S. Is Trying 'to Get Out the Facts'

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WASHINGTON, March 9 — The Reagan Administration has launched an information campaign to persuade Congress, the press and the public that it has been telling the truth when it says vital American interests are threatened by a military buildup in Nicaragua sponsored by Cuba and the Soviet Union.

News Analysis Senior State Department officials said this afternoon

that they had no illusions that the vigorous campaign would automatically end domestic opposition to the Administration's policy on Central America. That policy is aimed at stemming leftist insurgencies in El Salvador and elsewhere in the region through a combination of economic and military assistance as well as warnings of possible direct military intervention.

"We have to get out the facts we have so that people at least will agree on what is happening down there," said an aide to Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr. "Then, we can worry about getting them to accept the policy."

Adm. Bobby R. Inman, the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, was in charge of a briefing for the press today on the Nicaraguan military buildup.

Missile Crisis Atmosphere

Admiral Inman did not go so far as to say that the danger to the United States was similar to the threat posed by the Cuban missile crisis, when Soviet missile sites were being built in Cuba apparently to intimidate the United States. But there clearly was an effort to recreate some of the same atmosphere that existed in the tense days of October 1962.

The briefing officer was John T. Hughes, described by Admiral Inman as the best photo reconnaissance analyst in the United States.

Mr. Hughes, who did the major internal Government briefings during the Cuban crisis, spoke today in the same State Department auditorium that he used in 1962 to tell the American public of the military buildup in Cuba and the withdrawal of Soviet forces under the threat of an American invasion of the island.

On Wednesday, a briefing will be given to former secretaries of state and defense, and other national security figures of the past, such as Dean Rusk, George W. Ball, Maxwell D. Taylor and Henry A. Kissinger, in an effort to get their endorsement of the Administration's position.

A Briefing on Capitol Hill

On Thursday, briefings will be given on Capitol Hill to members of Congress who want to see evidence supporting the Administration's assertions.

On Friday, there is to be another briefing for the press, perhaps with Nicaraguan military defectors rebutting the Sandinist Government's denial that it has embarked on a major military buildup and is aiding the Salvadorean insurgents.

There were no striking revelations at the briefing today.

Mr. Haig, appearing on Capitol Hill last week, said that there were 2,000 Cuban military advisers and 70 Soviet advisers in Nicaragua.

And officials had already spoken with concern about the lengthening of Nicaraguan airfields and the building of new bases. The officials viewed these developments as preparations for the introduction of Soviet MIG fighters, to be flown by Nicaraguan pilots undergoing training in Cuba and Bulgaria.

Photos Support U.S. on Buildup

But the use of photos taken by American planes flying directly over and around Nicaragua seemed to provide credible support for the Administration's concern. What was missing from the briefing was any of the "overwhelming and irrefutable" evidence that Mr. Haig says the Administration has accumulated to prove that the Salvadorean insurgency is being directed from Nicaragua and Cuba by non-Salvadorans.

A State Department official said this evidence might not be supplied to the press because it was much more "sensitive" than photo reconnaissance.

The "sensitive" category would include information from undercover agents who could be compromised by release of the data. It would also include "signal and electronic intelligence," which involves sophisticated eavesdropping by ships, satellites, planes and land stations of voice, radar and radio signals. Traditionally, intelligence agencies have been very reluctant to allow the public access to such data.

Last week, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency discussed the "declassification" of the intelligence information. The department sought — and failed — to persuade the agency to release some of the material that would back up Mr. Haig's contention that the Salvadorean insurgents are commanded from outside El Salvador.

A Difficult Consensus

Without such information, it will be difficult to forge a consensus in Washington on what is happening in El Salvador.

It seems evident from the briefing today that the Nicaraguan forces are being expanded. But it has not yet been shown that there is a direct relationship between the expansion and the guerrilla war in El Salvador.

Admiral Inman said the briefing was the first in a series. He said El Salvador would be discussed later. He did not promise, however, to produce evidence said to link the two countries.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy had no trouble winning Congressional and public support for his confrontational policy with the Soviet Union over Cuba. That confrontation produced a major loss of face for the Soviet Union when Nikita S. Khrushchev backed down and pulled Soviet missiles and bombers out of Cuba.

A Two-Fold Problem

But, as Mr. Haig has found out on Capitol Hill, there is no such support today. The Administration's problems appear to be two-fold.

First, the danger posed to the United States from the Caribbean region does not seem so direct as it did in 1962.

The old Soviet T-55 tanks and out-of-date antiaircraft guns in Nicaragua may seem a vast arsenal in Central American terms. But they are hardly the same threat to the United States as the Soviet medium-range missiles in Cuba.

To persuade people that Nicaragua is a threat, it is necessary for Administration officials — as Admiral Inman did today — to repeat a modern day "domino theory" in which El Salvador, then Honduras and Guatemala, and eventually Costa Rica might fall to Cuban-backed insurgents, endangering the Panama Canal, Mexico and American shipping lanes.

Lack of Enthusiasm in Congress

Secondly, because of the Vietnam experience, many members of Congress have no enthusiasm, and indeed actively oppose, American involvement in guerrilla wars backing questionable governments.

Talk of a domino theory only links El Salvador to Vietnam more strongly in their minds, even though Mr. Haig and others say the analogy is wrong — that Central America is close at hand and should be decisively dealt with by the United States to prevent other Cubas from developing.

Admiral Inman, when asked today what he would suggest to eliminate the problem, said the C.I.A. does not make policy. Ask the State Department, he replied.

Mr. Haig, who testifies before a Senate committee on Wednesday, is trying to assure members of Congress that there are no plans to send American troops to El Salvador. But he is not ruling it out on the ground that such a declaration would encourage Cuba and Nicaragua to move more aggressively.

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